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ABSTRACT

A study examined the information processing construct of the speech rating error paradigm. Specifically, it tested the hypotheses that (1) attitude valence and dogmatism would interact in such a way that low dogmatic raters would show a positive trait error on the content traits material and analysis; (2) low dogmatic raters would evaluate a speech containing stimuli to which their attitudes are negatively valenced significantly higher than high dogmatics; (3) attitude valence and rhetorical sensitivity would interact in such a way that high rhetorically sensitive raters would show a negative trait error on the content traits of material and analysis; and (4) high rhetorically sensitive raters would show a significant negative leniency error in speech evaluation. Subjects, 83 students from six sections of a public speaking course, completed dogmatism and rhetorical sensitivity scales and evaluated videotaped speeches using the Becker-Bock rating scale. One of the speeches had been prepared in two forms--negatively valenced and positively valenced--and one version was shown to students in three sections of the course, the other to the remaining three sections. Findings supported hypotheses two and four, but not one and three. Dogmatism was found to significantly affect speech evaluation when the rater's attitude toward the speech topic was negatively valenced. In addition, no significant interaction was found between rhetorical sensitivity and attitude valence. The results support the information processing construct and rater error theory. (FL)

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THE EFFECTS OF DOGMATISM, RHETORICAL
SENSITIVITY AND ATTITUDE VALENCE
ON SELECTED SPEECH RATINGS

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ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF DOGMATISM, RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AND POSITION OF THE SPEAKER ON SELECTED SPEECH RATINGS

This study empirically examined the information processing construct of the rating error paradigm. The findings of this study indicated that dogmatism significantly affected speech evaluation when the rater's attitude toward the speech topic was negatively valenced. The findings of this study also indicated there was no significant interaction between rhetorical sensitivity and attitude valence. The results provide support for the information processing construct and rating error theory. A revision of rating error theory is presented and pedagogical implications are discussed.

THE EFFECTS OF DOGMATISM, RHETORICAL
SENSITIVITY AND POSITION OF THE SPEAKER
ON SELECTED SPEECH RATINGS

No act of communication is complete until it has been evaluated and criticized by others.¹ This can be seen daily in book reviews, film critiques, impression formation, and education. For example, an exam is a form of communication by which instructors critically assess the level of knowledge students acquire in a given subject, assigning them a grade corresponding to their evaluation.

In the speech communication classroom, oral presentations, as well as written exams, must be evaluated and criticized. Providing reliable and valid feedback for oral presentations has been a problem to scholars for years.² Because the speech rating process is not error free, a theory has been developed to control and predict rating error.³ Identification, prediction, and control of these errors would lead to more objective and accurate evaluations, which is a primary responsibility of the speech teacher and the goal of rating error theory.

The central theoretical proposition is that the rater's ability to utilize cognitive, affective, and psychomotor cues in the speech-evaluation setting is the major determinant of rating error.⁴

The theory of rating error (RE), until recently, has offered three constructs, referring to the act of speech evaluation (SE), the receiver component (RC), and the demand characteristics (DC),

to support the previously mentioned proposition. The entire theory could be summarized by the following:

$RE = f(SE, RC, DC, + e)$, where f = a function of, RE = rating error, SE = speech evaluation, RC = receiver component, DC = demand characteristics, and e = uncontrollable error.⁵

This paper presents an empirical investigation of the new construct presented by Bock, Guinand, and Perkins.⁶ The new construct, information processing (IP), is based on the concept of cue utilization. A cue may be defined as any stimulus in the situation that the observer focuses on, maintains an orientation toward, responds to, or associates with a response.⁷ This construct states that inadequate information processing, which is dependent on cue utilization, contributes to rating error⁸; information processing (IP) is comprised of physical cues (P), situational cues (S), emotional cues (Em), and logical cues (log), and may be represented as: $IP = f(P, S, Em, log, + e)$ where e = uncontrolled error.⁹ With the addition of the information processing construct, rating error theory is presently read as follows: $RE = f(SE, RC, DC, IP, + e)$.

There are six kinds of rating errors; three of which are attributable to the receiver component (leniency, halo, and trait errors), and three attributable to the act of speech evaluation, related to the rating instrument (error of proximity, error of central tendency and logical error). Leniency, halo and trait

errors have specifically been shown to significantly affect the speech evaluation process.¹⁰

A leniency error occurs when the rater is either too easy (positive leniency error) or too hard (negative leniency error) on all speakers.¹¹ For example, Bock found that easy-to-persuade raters were more positively lenient in speech rating than hard-to-persuade raters.¹²

A halo error may be defined as the tendency for a rater to be either too easy (positive halo error) or too hard (negative halo error) on a specific speaker.¹³ For example, Henrickson demonstrated that speaking performances of better know and better liked students were evaluated higher.¹⁴

The trait error is the tendency of the rater to be either too easy (positive trait error) or too hard (negative trait error) on a given trait (category) on the rating scale.¹⁵ There have been several studies conducted on the trait error phenomenon. For example, Bock and Saine reported significant three-way interaction between source credibility, attitude valence, and task sensitization on the trait of ideas.¹⁶ Bock and Munro demonstrated a rater's need for order significantly affected error on the trait of organization: a high need for order was associated with a positive trait error on organization.¹⁷

Thus far, the author has examined only errors related to the receiver component of Bock's paradigm. There are also three kinds of errors related to the rating instrument.

The error of central tendency occurs when a rater tends to group scores toward the middle of scale values. Research indicates that on a ten point scale, scores tend to group around seven.¹⁸

The proximity error is the tendency of the rater to give two traits on a rating scale the same rating simply because they are next to one another on the page.¹⁹ For example, material and posture may be rated similarly because they are in close proximity on the rating scale.

The logical error is the tendency of the rater to rate traits alike because they are logically related.²⁰ A rater might, for example, evaluate material and language similarly because they are both content factors.

These six errors: (1) leniency error, (2) halo error, (3) trait error, (4) error of central tendency, (5) proximity error, and (6) logical error contribute to rating error. Leniency, halo, and trait errors, because they are associated with the receiver component, in which the new construct information processing occurs, are the foci of this paper.

Dogmatism, as reported by Bostrom, has no significant effect on speech rating behavior.²¹ However, Bostrom failed to control for the raters' attitude toward the speech topic, which in relation to dogmatism, could significantly affect rating behavior. For example, Donohew, Parker, and McDermott found that when confronted with discrepant stimuli, low dogmatics tended to show

greater arousal than did high dogmatics.²² Increased arousal should reduce the rater's capability to utilize cues. According to Easterbrook, reduction in the range of cue utilization was found to have been associated with an increase in drive.²³ Providing increased drive greatens arousal, and arousal, which inhibits the ability to utilize cues, is greater in low dogmatics than high dogmatics when presented with stimuli to which they are negatively valenced, the following hypotheses were generated: H_1 : Attitude valence and dogmatism will interact such that low dogmatic raters will show a positive trait error on the content traits material and analysis; H_2 : Low dogmatic raters will evaluate a speech containing stimuli to which their attitudes are negatively valenced significantly higher than high dogmatics (positive halo error).

According to Hart and Burks, a rhetorically sensitive person seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication.²⁴ Although Hart and Burks refer to rhetorical sensitivity in terms of an interpersonal setting, the ability to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable information clearly involves the ability to process and utilize physical cues, situational cues, emotional cues, and logical cues. For example, it seems logical if a rhetorically sensitive rater were presented with a speech to which his/her attitude was negatively valenced, the rater would distinguish the information as unacceptable, consequently giving the speech a lower score.

The preceding example, along with the logical assumption that in order to distinguish acceptable information from unacceptable information, the rhetorically sensitive person is better able to process and utilize cues, lead the authors to the following hypotheses: H_3 : Attitude valence and rhetorical sensitivity will interact such that high rhetorically sensitive raters will show a negative trait error on the content traits of material and analysis; H_4 : High rhetorically sensitive raters will show a significant negative leniency error in speech evaluation.

As previously mentioned, the receiver component (RC) of the rating error paradigm accounts for leniency, halo, and trait errors. Because both dogmatism and rhetorical sensitivity are psychological in nature, varying in degree from rater to rater, they are variables within the receiver component. The topic of the speech is a demand characteristic that may influence speech evaluation according to a rater's attitudinal valence toward the said topic. The receiver component (RC) and the demand characteristics (DC) of the situation may affect the rater's ability to process information, thus providing an examination of the proposed construct.

Methodology

Subjects: Subjects ($n=83$) were randomly drawn from six sections of the basic public speaking course at a medium-sized midwestern university.

Measuring Instruments: The dogmatism scores were obtained with form E of the scale advanced by RoKeach.²⁵ A reliability coefficient of .81 was obtained for this scale.

Rhetorical sensitivity scores were obtained from the RHETSEN scale developed by Hart et. al.²⁶ Internal reliability was acceptable in the rhetorical sensitivity (RS) version of the scale, which had a reliability coefficient of .84.

Subjects evaluated video-taped speeches using the Becker-Bock rating scale, which has been tested and found to be reliable and valid.²⁷

Procedure: Subjects were asked to complete the form E dogmatism scale four weeks into fall semester 1983. Subjects were asked to complete the RS version of the RHETSEN scale six weeks into fall semester 1983.

During the fourteenth week of fall semester, 1983, the subjects were asked to evaluate three 5-7 minute informative speeches. The three speeches were judged to represent approximately average to above average grades by a panel of one faculty judge and four graduate teaching assistants.

A random sample (N=91) of students enrolled in the basic course were asked to respond to a "campus questionnaire". The questionnaire contained statements about various campus issues. In answering the Likert-type statements, subjects responded to the following measure: Tuition at this institution should be increased. The response choices were: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. Strongly agree responses received a score of one; strongly disagree responses received a score of five. Ninety percent of the subjects

responded either disagree or strongly disagree, producing a mean score of 4.4.

The speakers were shown to all subjects in the same order: speaker A, speaker B, and speaker C. Speaker B recorded one speech in favor of a tuition increase (negatively valenced stimuli) and recorded another speech against tuition increase (positively valenced stimuli). Subjects in three sections were shown the series of three speeches containing the negatively valenced speech. Subjects in the three remaining sections were shown the positively valenced speech. Rating blanks were gathered from regular class instructors by the authors.

Statistical designs: A 2 x 2 ANOVA with unequal cell frequencies was used to test interaction between attitude valence and dogmatism or rhetorical sensitivity, hypotheses one and three respectively.

A t-test between level of dogmatism and speaker B's halo errors in the negatively valenced condition was used to determine significance of hypothesis two.

A t-test between level of rhetorical sensitivity and rater leniency errors was conducted to determine the significance of hypothesis four.

The upper and lower quartiles of each sample group were used for all statistical analyses.

Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

There was no significant interaction between rhetorical sensitivity and attitude valence on either material or analysis. However, there was significant interaction for attitude valence on the trait of material, accounting for 20% of the variance.

Insert Tables 3 and 4 about here

A standard t-test was computed on the obtained data for hypothesis two. Table 5 shows a significant t-value between high and low dogmatic subjects in the negatively valenced stimulus condition.

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 6 shows no significance between rhetorical sensitivity and leniency errors.

Insert Table 6 about here

Conclusion: Hypothesis one, that dogmatism and attitude valence would interact to show a positive trait error on material and analysis was rejected (See Tables 1 and 2). This tends to support Bostrom's conclusion that dogmatism has little, if anything, to do with speech rating behavior.²⁸

However, hypothesis two, that low dogmatics will rate the negatively valenced speech significantly higher than high dogmatics was confirmed, $p .05$ (See Table 5). When confronted with discrepant stimuli to which they held negative attitudes, the low dogmatic rater becomes more aroused. This arousal apparently inhibits his or her ability to utilize cues, and therefore, processes information adequately, resulting in a positive halo error because of the speech topic.

Hypothesis three, that rhetorical sensitivity and attitude valence would interact such that high rhetorically sensitive subjects would show a negative trait error on material and analysis was rejected. However, attitude valence did yield a significant F ratio, $p .05$, on material (See Table 3). This finding also suggests, as did the results from hypothesis three, that the position a speaker takes on a topic with respect to the attitudes of the raters can have a significant impact on his/her evaluation.

Hypothesis four, that high rhetorically sensitive raters would show a significant negative leniency error was not confirmed. However, the mean for the high rhetorically sensitive rater was lower than the mean for the low rhetorically sensitive rater. (See Table 6). This finding suggests that while high rhetorically sensitive raters do not rate speeches significantly lower, there is a slight tendency, as can be seen in Table 6, for high rhetorically sensitive raters to be negatively lenient in speech evaluation.

The findings for this study have important implications in terms of both rating error theory and practical application for teachers of speech.

The information processing (IP) construct of rating error theory, because of its relationship to cue utilization, is the central construct of the theory, and as such is inherently supported whenever an aspect of either the receiver component (RC) or the demand characteristic (DC) construct is supported. For example, only when a variable of either the demand characteristic (DC) construct or the receiver component (RC) construct alters the information processing ability of the rater is it recognized and acknowledged as an error source.

With the information processing (IP) construct assuming the central theoretical position, the authors suggest rating error theory may be more parsimoniously expressed as follows: $RZ = f(IP)$, where $IP = f(RC, DC, + e)$. It was decided not to include the speech evaluation (SE) construct of the original rating error theory because its functions are repetitive with those in the receiver component (RC) construct, with the exception of aR , which as has been stated in this paper is the major source of rating error and therefore must be acknowledged as such. Similarly, demand characteristics such as sex of the experimenter, VTR speeches, profanity etc. . . have been reported to significantly influence the speech evaluation process.

The relationship between the receiver component (RC) construct and the demand characteristic (DC) construct becomes apparent in a

comparison of the following equations: $IP = f(P, S, Em, Log, + e)$ and $IP = f(RC, DC, +e)$, the later being advanced by the authors. Clearly, emotional (Em) and logical (log) constructs are in the domain of the receiver component (RC); and physical (P) and situational (S) constructs are in the domain of demand characteristics (DC). Information processing then can be affected by the rater (RC construct and/or environmental factors (DC construct)).

From a theoretical standpoint, the deletion of the speech evaluation (SE) construct is logical: because communication is a process, it implies feedback; as a result, any component of the communication process will affect the evaluation process when it influences information processing. Thus the centrality of the information processing (IP) construct to rating error theory has been established.

This information may be incorporated into the speech communication classroom, particularly in providing instruction regarding topic selection, audience analysis, supporting materials, and peer evaluation.

Topic selection is a vital start in preparing and delivering an effective speech. This study demonstrated that poor topic selection, a demand characteristic resulting from poor audience analysis, can influence a rater's evaluation of the speaker. Based on the results of this study, teachers can inform students that a controversial topic will not necessarily result in poor evaluations. That, in fact, a controversial, negatively valenced topic may increase the positive evaluations received from peers.

Teachers can also apply this information by stressing the importance of developing sound supporting materials so as to reduce the amount of inadequately supported contentions in a speech. By doing this, the speaker may be judged as more effective by those raters whose attitude toward the speech is positively valenced.

Finally, teachers can inform students that as speech raters, they should try to identify their attitude toward the topic, taking that attitude into account while evaluating the speech. This may lead to more accurate evaluations, which should lead to an increased level of accomplishment in the students speaking ability.

One limitation of this study is that the results cannot be generalized beyond the classroom. Another limitation of this study is the nature of the stimulus material: attitude valence was represented by the position of the speaker took regarding a tuition increase. Perhaps the strength of attitudes regarding tuition increase among freshmen who had not yet experienced a tuition increase was exaggerated. Other topics may influence evaluations differently with respect to the valenced attitudes of the rater. Perhaps the greatest limitation of this study was the small number of subjects used in the statistical analyses; more subjects may have yielded different results.

Yet there are a number of implications of future research suggested by the results of this study:

- 1) Examination of situational cues, physical cues, emotional cues, and logical cues as they affect information processing (IP) would provide further support for the validity and inclusion of the information processing construct as central to rating error theory.
- 2) Examination of the evaluations given speeches representing greater and lesser degrees of attitude valence would lead to more valid conclusions regarding the effect of the speech topic on subsequent ratings.
- 3) Examination of variables within the receiver component (RC) of rating error theory would contribute to the understanding of the cue utilization proposition. For example, it seems logical that raters high in cognitive complexity would be better able to process and utilize available cues, resulting in lower speech ratings.
- 4) Examination of the interactions among variables originating in both the receiver component (RC) construct and the demand characteristics (DC) construct of rating error theory would provide a more parsimonious explanation of rating error and add coherence to the formula, $RE = f(IP)$, where $IP = f(RC, DC, + e)$.

These and similar studies are needed before the speech evaluation process can be more fully understood and rating error theory further developed. An understanding of the speech

evaluation process is essential because it is an integral part of virtually every speech class. Furthermore, an increased understanding of the speech rating process will lead to more accurate evaluations from both teachers and students. Providing accurate speech evaluations is a primary responsibility of the speech teacher. Hence, research regarding the speech evaluation process and the development of a taxonomical theory thereof becomes beneficial and necessary.

Table 1

ANOVA for material trait

<u>source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>PR</u>
A.V.	1	.191	.82	.37
dog	1	.080	.34	.56
A.V. X dog	1	.021	.09	.76
error	35	.234		
Total	38	.223		

$$\eta^2 = .03$$

Table 2

ANOVA for analysis trait

<u>source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>PR</u>
A.V.	1	.003	.02	.89
dog	1	.015	.08	.77
A.V. X dog	1	.184	1.00	.32
error	35	.185		
Total	38	.176		

$$\eta^2 = .03$$

Table 3

ANOVA for material trait

<u>source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>PR</u>
A.V.	1	.484	5.09	.03*
RS	1	.0001	.00	.97
A.V. X RS	1	.194	2.04	.16
error	29	.095		
Total	32	.107		

$$\eta^2 = .20$$

*significant at .05

mean of the positively valenced speech = +.06

mean of the negatively valenced speech = -.18

Table 4

ANOVA for analysis trait

<u>source</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>PR</u>
A.V.	1	.004	0.03	0.87
RS	1	.160	0.92	0.34
A.V. X RS	1	.073	0.42	0.52
error	29	.173		
Total	32	.164		

$$\eta^2 = 0.04$$

Table 5

<u>Halo error Speaker B</u>	<u>Number of cases</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>T value</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>
low dog	8	.5239	.547	2.60*	7
high dog	8	-.1367	.463	2.60	7

*significant at .05

Table 6

<u>Leniency error speaker B</u>	<u>Number of cases</u>	<u>mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>	<u>T value</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>
low R.S.	17	-.1182	.669	0.856	16
high R.S.	16	-.2956	.503	0.863	15

NOTES

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⁴Bock, Guinand, and Perkins, "The Effects of Rater Communication Apprehension," p. 2.

⁵Douglas G. Bock and E. Hope Bock, "The Effects of Positional Stress and Receiver Apprehension on Leniency Errors in Speech Evaluation," Communication Education, (in press), p. 4.

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⁷J. A. Easterbrook, "The Effect of Emotion on Cue Utilization and the Organization of Behavior," Psychological Review, 66 (1959), 183-199.

⁸Bock, Guinand, and Perkins, "The Effects of Rater Communication Apprehension," P. 2.

⁹Bock, Guinand, and Perkins, "The Effects of Rater Communication Apprehension," p. 2.

¹⁰See for example, Bock, "The Effects of Persuasibility," pp. 296-300; Bock and Saine, "The Impact of Source Credibility," pp. 229-236; Bock, Guinand, and Perkins, "The Effects of Rater Communication Apprehension," SCA 1983.

¹¹Bock and Bock, Evaluating Classroom Speaking, p. 4.

¹²Bock, "The Effects of Persuasibility," pp. 296-300.

- ¹³Bock and Bock, Evaluating Classroom Speaking, p. 3.
- ¹⁴Henrickson, "The Relation Among Knowing a Person," pp. 22-25.
- ¹⁵Bock and Bock, Evaluating Classroom Speaking, p. 4.
- ¹⁶Bock and Saine, "The Impact of Source Credibility," 229-236.
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